

21st century skills

Steve Baxter

This video is available from www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/new-snr-assessment-te/redev-snr-syll/21st-century-skills/steve-baxter

Steve Baxter

Founder,
River City Labs,
Queensland's Chief
Entrepreneur

People ask where I grew up and I say I grew up in the Australian army. I joined as an apprentice in 1987, 15 years old, signed up for nine years. From there, I was posted to Adelaide back in 1994. It was great. I enjoyed it.

I had an idea to start a business providing dial up internet services to people and just things exploded from there. I joined a computer user group for a very strange operating system called Linux. And it was very, very early. It had only been out six or seven months, maybe a year. I went to one meeting where someone had actually built a windowing system on it and I saw someone using a web browser.

It's a light bulb moment.

To me it was just so obvious that the world was going to change. I was pretty sure banking was going to change and I was pretty sure that you would be able to buy software and even books online and it would be really easy to ship things.

You don't pick a tech winner. The things I think are going to be great aren't as great as they're going to be for example. So one thing I've learnt is that if you're going to invest in something, you find really honest, young, smart people and you invest in them.

We need IT skills. We need more software skills. We really need that, we need to push it so hard. It is so important — it is the critical thing for the next hundred years. Young people need to come out of the school sector with a far greater appreciation of skills in the IT space.

In the Industrial Revolution I suppose steam power and mechanical power replaced human power, and right now software power is actually replacing the thinking power and the doing power of people at the same time.

If we're going to advance our economy past the things we do well, we need those software, we need those IT skills.

We actually have a liberal society with entrepreneurs and business people actually leading the way and actually creating value and so I need more people doing that. So, we need to give the maximum possible chance for opportunity.

My advice to young people around effective communication skills is, you've got to understand what they want. Effective communication is knowing the person you're talking to and how they're motivated.

Understand people's motivations for the advice they give you and ask about that person's background and understand that because they'll give you some advice. You have to understand how to apply the advice you're getting.

Ask the right person the right question, understand their journey and then you actually understand the nuggets you can take out of it.

One of the things I liked about the army was there was very much an attitude that you got to talk through a problem. You got to actually contribute but once the boss said this is how you're doing it, the debate was over and you just got on and you did it.

It was quite a collaborative approach, but at the same time, someone's got to lead. If you get leadership right you can get amazing results.

So, be honest, be open, listen, set a high standard, maintain a high standard.

My wish for young Queenslanders is that they have all the opportunity in the world to do whatever they want.

That is not gifting them anything.

That is giving them the chance to try.